The National Park Service
Fact Sheet

Alternative Transportation Program
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Alternative Transportation Program

2003

The National Park Service (NPS) Alternative Transportation Program (ATP) coordinates policies, projects, and activities related to planning, partnering, and implementing alternative transportation systems (ATS) within NPS units and surrounding communities.

Given increased transportation planning responsibilities by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), the Alternative Transportation Program (ATP) was developed as part of the Federal Lands Highway Program in 1998. Each fiscal year from 1999 to 2002, the ATP budgeted between $8 million and $13 million for ATS efforts.

In 2001, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the U.S. Department of Transportation released the "Federal Lands Alternative Transportation Systems Study." Mandated by Congress in Section 3039 of TEA-21, the study identified transit needs at NPS units and concluded that meeting these needs — by improving or expanding existing services and by implementing new services — will cost approximately $78 million a year through 2020, for a total cost of $1.55 billion. This cost includes project development, vehicle and equipment purchases, and operations and maintenance.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

NPS Alternative Transportation Program:

http://www.nps.gov/transportation/alt/index.htm

VISITING A NATIONAL PARK UNIT TODAY

Nearly 300 million people each year from the U.S. and around the world escape the fast pace of daily life to visit our national park units. But park visitors are increasingly finding the congestion, noise, and haze they had hoped to leave behind.

Increasing park visitation and traffic congestion on park roads and in parking areas can lead to visitor frustration. On a typical summer day at Grand Canyon National Park, nearly 6,000 vehicles compete for 2,400 parking spaces.

After its grand opening in 2000 (as shown above), the shuttle bus service at Zion National Park in Utah eliminated 42,000 vehicle trips and allowed visitors to get out and enjoy the park instead of searching for a parking space.

(Robb Williams for the USDOE, 2000)

Traffic congestion also causes air and noise pollution and threatens fragile natural and cultural resources, especially when vehicles are parked in undesignated areas. Pollutants from motor vehicles, including carbon monoxide, volatile organic carbons, nitrogen oxides, and sulfur dioxide, are dangerous to the health of not only park visitors, but also wildlife, plants, lakes, streams, and soils. Air pollution can also cause haze, which can impair the visibility at scenic vistas. Increased traffic also means more noise, drowning out the natural quiet and impacting wildlife.

Park visitation is expected to continue to increase, reaching 367 million visitors by the year 2020. However, building new roads and expanding parking areas may not be the best solutions to handling increased park visitation.

A SOLUTION: TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES

The National Park Service has developed over 100 alternative transportation systems in more than 90 parks. To learn more about the systems depicted on the map with stars, visit http://www.nps.gov/transportation/alt/index.htm.

The National Park Service (NPS) is exploring the use of buses and other transportation alternatives to accommodate more visitors, alleviate congestion, improve the visitor experience, and protect park resources. Alternative transportation can help reduce the number of motor vehicles in our parks. Examples of alternative transportation include shuttle buses, trams, trolleys, and water taxis.

Alternative transportation systems (ATS) integrate all modes of travel within a park, including land and water based transportation. These systems use a variety of transportation means, including alternative-fuel shuttle buses (running on fuels like propane, electricity, and natural gas), trolleys, water taxis, canal boats, and aerial tramways. ATS are designed to fit into the natural setting of park, improve the visitor experience, and protect park resources, including the natural soundscape and wildlife. Parks work with local communities, businesses, state and local governments, and environmental and historic preservation groups to design transportation systems that meet the needs of park resources, visitors, and surrounding communities.

NPS ALTERNATIVE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

MISSION AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The mission of the ATP is to preserve and protect resources while providing safe and enjoyable access within national park units by using sustainable, appropriate, and integrated transportation solutions. The following are some of the ATP's accomplishments since its inception in 1998:

- Allocated nearly $40 million in federal transportation funds to more than 200 planning and implementation projects across the country.
- Published a transportation planning guidebook for NPS managers about transportation planning, local partnerships, funding, and best practices.
- Formed a federal interagency and multidisciplinary Transportation Assistance Group that has assisted more than 40 parks with alternative transportation issues, plans, and projects.
- Conducted the National Vehicle Design Conference with parks and private industry in order to consider prototypes of future transit vehicles for the NPS.
- Conducted four regional transportation training conferences entitled "New Approaches to Transportation: Planning, Programs, and Partnerships."
- Published the NPS Guide to Seeking Transportation Enhancement Program Funds.
- Worked with the National Park Foundation and Ford Motor Company's Proud Partners Program to coordinate transportation scholars and interpreters in parks and to rehabilitate the historic red buses in Glacier National Park.
- Released the ATP "FY 2002-2006 Program Strategy Plan," which outlines specific actions to be achieved and opportunities to partner.

ATS SUCCESS STORIES

Over the last few years, the ATP has helped the following three parks develop successful alternative transportation systems.

Acadia National Park

Visited by more than three million people each year, Acadia National Park in Maine faced growing congestion and impaired air quality. To protect natural resources and improve the visitor experience, Acadia formed an innovative partnership with local communities, businesses, and governments to implement alternative transportation. In 1999, Acadia began using propane-powered buses to shuttle visitors to popular park destinations, campgrounds, hotels, ferry terminals, and community centers. Personal vehicles are still allowed in the park, but the Island Explorer shuttle bus system is popular with visitors and residents alike. In 2001, more than 200,000 people rode the buses, keeping 88,000 vehicles off the roads during the peak summer season. Congestion has decreased, noise levels along park roads have noticeably lessened, carbon monoxide (CO) emissions have dropped by 33 percent, and volatile organic carbon (VOC) emissions have dropped by 25 percent.

Between 1999 and 2001, ridership on Island Explorer buses grew by 75 percent.

Cape Cod National Seashore

As more visitors come each year to the over 43,000 acres of shoreline, historic sites, museums, and lighthouses of **Cape Cod National Seashore** in Massachusetts, traffic congestion on Cape Cod continues to increase. Since 2000, tourists and residents have been able to ride propane buses from Memorial Day through Columbus Day to Cape Cod National Seashore beaches and to town attractions between Truro and Provincetown. Since this bus system was implemented, other communities on Cape Cod have shown interest in expanding ATS service.

The Truro-Provincetown shuttle bus service may be expanded to year-round service that reaches more Cape cod towns.

Zion National Park

Approximately 2.5 million visitors come to Zion National Park in Utah each year to enjoy its scenic canyons, sandstone cliffs, creeks, and a variety of wildlife. To stop increasing traffic congestion from impacting the air quality and the natural quiet of the park, Zion and the local community of Springdale jointly sponsored a propane-powered shuttle bus system in 2000. The system has reduced air and noise pollution, helped the local economy, and improved visitor experience. Vehicle use is restricted in the most visited area of the park, Zion Canyon, from April through October. Thirty propane-powered buses shuttle visitors between the nearby town of Springdale and Zion Canyon attractions. Introducing shuttle buses eased congestion in Zion, reduced noise, decreased CO emissions by 46 percent, and lowered VOC emissions by 44 percent.

After shuttle bus service began at Zion, visitors told park rangers that they could now hear a river near the main road in Zion Canyon and occasionally spot cougars.